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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

22 May 1985

JORDAN: CAN HUSSEIN DUMP THE PLO?

Summary

King Hussein insists that he cannot enter peace negotiations without PLO backing. He regards as still binding the 1974 Rabat Arab Summit decision naming the PLO "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people". The King, moreover, is acutely aware that Arafat continues to command broad popular support within the West Bank and the Palestinian diaspora and to have the backing of most Arab leaders. If Arafat dithers indefinitely in his talks with the King, Hussein probably will encourage West Bank Palestinians to forsake their ties to the PLO and join with Jordan in peace negotiations with Israel. The King almost certainly will fail to elicit sufficient participation by West Bank leaders because of their fear of reprisals should they challenge PLO authority. We do not believe Hussein would enter negotiations without some form of credible Palestinian support.

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Hussein has a new sense of urgency to move toward peace negotiations, according to US Embassy officials. He believes 1985 is an optimum year to make progress. He sees President Reagan's reelection and the election of Prime Minister Peres in Israel as auspicious signs. The King also believes that the PLO's internal crisis and consequent weakening of Arafat's

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Israel-Jordan-Palestinian Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 21 May 1985 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [redacted]

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leadership provide him with greater opportunities to win PLO cooperation in entering peace negotiations.

Hussein's decision to host the long delayed Palestine National Council in Amman last November was designed to encourage Arafat to break with Syria and Syrian-supported Palestinian radicals and cooperate with moderate Arab leaders to find a formula for peace. US Embassy reporting suggests the King saw Arafat's actions at that time as evidence that he too wanted to pursue this course. Not only did he defy Syria and radical Palestinian groups to convene the National Council, but he also eliminated their influence in major Palestinian committees by appointing his own supporters to key posts. Both Hussein and Arafat believed that such appointments would strengthen Arafat's position and reduce the chances that these councils would veto his actions.

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Hussein was encouraged further when Arafat agreed to sign the 11 February PLO-Jordan framework accord endorsing joint action. Since February, however, Hussein and Arafat have been at odds over the selection of Palestinian representatives for a joint delegation.

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Hussein insists that Arafat and his colleagues must allow Palestinians not clearly identified with the organization to serve on the delegation. He argues that other candidates are not valid because neither Israel nor the United States will accept them. [ ] suggest that Arafat himself would be willing to allow non-PLO Palestinians to represent the organization in initial talks but senior aides in his dominant Fatah component reject anything less than direct PLO participation. These include Salah Khalaf, head of central security and Faruq Qaddumi, the head of the PLO's political department.

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US Embassy reporting indicates Hussein is beginning to doubt that Arafat will overrule his Fatah colleagues on the joint delegation issue. Hussein believes Arafat attaches supreme importance to preserving his leadership over a united Fatah and would abandon the dialogue if he believed it were alienating key supporters like Khalaf and Qaddumi.

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#### Hussein's Options if Arafat Balks

We believe King Hussein has become increasingly concerned that Arafat will evade firm commitments as he did during the last abortive Jordan-PLO talks in the spring 1983. The King therefore is considering other options if Arafat balks.

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Hussein has ruled out the possibility of a unilateral move to enter peace negotiations with Israel. In his view the Palestinians' demographic majority in Jordan, Jordan's heavy financial dependence on Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Arab

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states that back Arafat, and Jordan's military vulnerability vis-a-vis its Arab neighbors prevent such a decision.

The King instead has begun to look to West Bank leaders--those most directly affected by the Israeli occupation--to legitimize Jordan's entry into peace negotiations. Hussein realizes that West Bank notables still take their lead from Arafat and the PLO, but the King hopes they will become amenable to cooperation with Jordan if Arafat once again falters.

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Hussein thus is trying to enhance ties between the East and West Banks. In January 1984 he reconvened Jordan's long-suspended parliament, which is evenly split between East and West Bank representatives. This has given West Bankers their first opportunity in many years to air grievances in an official forum.

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The King also appointed a new government in April 1985, bringing in the largest number of Palestinians since the 1970-71 civil war. The new Prime Minister, Zayd Rifai, is well-known for his contacts on the West Bank

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Rifai's first priority toward the West Bank has been to ease the tensions created by former Prime Minister Obeidat's efforts to restrict West Bank access to the East Bank. To this end, he recently lifted bridge crossing restrictions for young West Bankers who want to study or work in Jordan.

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Hussein hopes such measures will help encourage West Bankers to regard cooperation with Jordan as their best opportunity to achieve a peace settlement ending Israel's occupation. He believes his strongest argument is that Israel is willing to deal with Jordan, but will not talk to the PLO.

### Prospects

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Hussein almost certainly is overestimating the possibility that West Bank leaders will ultimately defy the PLO. They have little political clout outside of their own villages and have never demonstrated a willingness to challenge the PLO's authority in deciding the future of the territories. A small group of about 40 notables has traveled to Amman several times to encourage Arafat to reach an agreement with the King on entering peace talks, but we do not believe they would risk stepping forward on their own if Hussein abandoned his dialogue with Arafat. West Bankers would reject such a decision primarily because they fear attacks on their families and properties by both pro-Arafat and Syrian-backed radical Palestinians.

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Despite Hussein's strong desire to settle the Palestinian issue, we believe he will eventually step back from his current

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diplomatic activity if Arafat continues to maneuver inconclusively. In our judgment, Hussein would find the stability of his country threatened more by a decision to move ahead without PLO support than living with the status quo.

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What Could Change?

The collapse of Israel's National Unity Government and the emergence of the Labor Party as the clearly dominant partner in any future coalition would probably encourage Hussein to redouble his efforts with West Bankers. He would argue that such a development represented the best and probably the last opportunity to open negotiations with flexible Israeli interlocutors.

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We believe, however, that West Bankers still would be reluctant to join with Hussein. An improvement of Israeli attitudes toward the territories may lessen the more onerous occupation practices, but it would not reduce the threat of PLO reprisal for ignoring the PLO's rejection of negotiations with Israel. West Bankers are aware in any event that even the most generous terms Labor could agree to would include ceding at least some portion of the West Bank--as well as East Jerusalem--to Israel, labeling them as traitors likely marked for assassination.

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SUBJECT: JORDAN: Can Hussein Dump the PLO?

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